Works of Art in Washington

BY

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WASHINGTON is not famed as an art center and yet there are few cities in the United States which possess so much of interest in this field. The city itself is, in the first place, a work of art, having been laid out with great skill and artistic intuition by Major L'Enfant, a French engineer, in consultation with George Washington. The city is beautifully located and its plan is exceptionally fine. This plan provides a gridiron of streets crossed by a series of radial avenues with public buildings so placed that they may for all time have both proper relation and appropriate setting.

Over one hundred years after the city of Washington was laid out, a committee of experts was commissioned by the United States Senate to draw up a plan for the future development of the National Capital along artistic lines, and after mature consideration this Commission determined that the best possible course that could be pursued would be the readoption and elaboration of the original plan, by that time nearly forgotten. Thus L'Enfant's plan became the basis of the plan of the now famous Park Commission, composed of Daniel H. Burnham, Charles F. McKim, Augustus Saint Gaudens and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., which, though never officially adopted, has been systematically followed and is universally approved. Indeed this report has had a wide influence upon city building not only in the United States but throughout the world—and city building, it should be remembered, is, after all, a combination of all the arts.

The architecture of the government buildings in Washington is in almost every instance classic, a style adopted by the early builders of the Republic with excellent taste and judgment. Jefferson, who was deeply concerned with this matter, repeatedly urged that classical models, which the world for centuries had agreed to admire, should be consistently followed. In a letter addressed to Madison, in 1785, he said, "How is a taste in the beautiful Art (*architecture*) to be formed in our countrymen unless we avail ourselves of every occasion when public buildings are to be erected, of presenting to them models for their study and imitation?"

The first buildings erected, notably the Capitol and the White House, were models, and reflected the good taste and judgment of the period. The Treasury, the Patent Office and the building now used as the General Land Office were likewise designed in the classic style and are worthy examples. The Pension Office, War, State and Navy Building, Post-Office and old National Museum witness, however, to a decadence which occurred in the latter half of the last century from which as builders this Nation has but recently emerged. That an era of better taste has again dawned is evidenced by the new office buildings for the House and Senate, the new Department of Agriculture, the new National Museum and the Union Station, all of which have been erected within the past ten years. Thornton was the architect of the Capitol, Hoban of the White House, Latrobe of St. John's Church on Sixteenth and H Streets. To these first architects of our young Nation all honor is due. They built both suitably and beautifully and hence produced real works of art.

Between St. John's Church and the White House lies Lafayette Square, in the center of which stands a statue of General Jackson, the hero of New Orleans. This is the first equestrian statue erected in the United States,

and it was unveiled as late as 1853, well within the memory of many who are now living. Clark Mills, the sculptor, had never seen an equestrian statue when he modeled it, and great technical difficulties attended its execution. For a good many years it has been customary to regard this statue as a monstrous joke, because of its somewhat remarkable poise and the delight Congress took therein, wondering not so much at the sculptor's ability to produce a portrait statue as to balance a horse on his hind legs. However, it should be noted that whereas this statue may not be ranked with great works of art, or even lesser ones, it has, besides a very charming naiveté, a decorative quality which makes it worthy of esteem.

Clark Mills was also the sculptor of the equestrian statue of Washington in Washington Circle, which is, however, a less commendable work.

There are undoubtedly more equestrian statues in Washington than in any other city in the world. Some, it is true, afford little occasion for pride, but others are exceedingly noteworthy. It would be difficult to find anything much worse artistically than the statue of Sherman south of the Treasury Department; on the other hand, however, all authorities agree that there are few equestrian statues which in merit compare with the statue of General Thomas in Thomas Circle, the work of J. Q. A. Ward.

At the head of Connecticut Avenue there is an equestrian statue of General McClellan by Macmonnies, an excellent statue, very badly placed. In Sheridan Circle, at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street, is an equestrian statue of General Sheridan, by Gutzon Borglum, which is very unconventional, and hence both admired and condemned. At the foot of the Capitol, in what is now the Botanical Gardens, but will later be an open plaza, is a monument to

General Grant, by H. M. Shrady, in course of erection. On the axis of this memorial and the Capitol, at a considerable distance across the Mall, stands the Washington Monument, simple and beautiful in its purity and dignity as the character it commemorates. On the same axis, more than a mile beyond, in what is known as Potomac Park, is to be built the Memorial to Lincoln, designed by Henry Bacon, for which appropriation has been made by Congress—a memorial which will commemorate not only the man but that for which he stood.

On the four corners of Lafayette Square are monuments to foreign officers who served in the Revolutionary War, Lafayette, Kosciusko, Rochambeau and Steuben. The last, which is by Albert Jaegers, is, as a work of art, the most important. On Pennsylvania Avenue between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets is an equestrian statue of Pulaski by Kasimir Chodzinski, which likewise has much to commend it. At the foot of Seventeenth Street, on the Speedway, is a statue of John Paul Jones, by Charles H. Niehaus, excellent in many respects, the pedestal of which was designed by Thomas Hastings, the well known architect. There are two other statues by Mr. Niehaus in Washington, Garfield to the west of the Capitol grounds, and Hahnemann, on Scott Circle, the latter especially notable. To the west of Franklin Square, on Fourteenth Street, has recently been unveiled a memorial to Commodore Barry, designed and modeled by John Boyle.

The most distinguished and significant of all the sculpture in Washington is not, however, the statue of a martial hero, but a simple figure of a woman, inscrutable, profound, modeled by Augustus Saint-Gaudens for Mr. Henry Adams, known as the Adams Memorial, and erected in Rock Creek Cemetery, which lies to the north of the city beyond Soldiers' Home. This bronze figure, which is enveloped in heavy drapery, is seated on a

boulder against a great granite block, which forms one side of an hexogonal inclosure about twenty feet in diameter. Opposite, and occupying three sides of the hexagon, is a massive stone seat. The whole is shielded and shut in by close-growing pines and cedars. There have been many surmises as to what this figure meant, but Saint-Gaudens never gave it a name. Some call it "The Peace of God," others "Mystery." At the time it was modeled the sculptor was much influenced by La Farge and the thought he had brought back with him from the Orient, thus the mysticism of the Far East is mingled with the reverent truth seeking of the Far West and finds in this wonderful figure extraordinary expression. In the presence of this impressive figure all are silent. As Lorado Taft has said, "You may recognize beautifully proportioned mouldings on the granite background, or may perceive that the shrouded figure is seated upon a boulder of different material, that the modeling of the drapery is very broad and coarse in texture; but these things seem to mean very little in this presence. One feels no concern in trifles when confronting eternity. And that is where one finds himself when under the spell of this amazing work."

To reach Rock Creek Cemetery it is well to take a car on Ninth Street and go to Soldiers' Home. The cemetery gate is a few minutes' walk to the left from the end of the car line. Entering the cemetery one takes a road leading into the heart of the reservation and after going to the first broad cross-road turns first to the left, then to the right and straight ahead to the clump of evergreens which screen the memorial from view. As landmarks on the way may be noted a row of masoleums, a memorial in the form of a huge seat with arms, and a very tall pointed cedar. From Ninth and F Streets the trip on the cars occupies about three-quarters of an hour and the walk about fifteen minutes. All who

make the trip are, however, well repaid, for this noble memorial is indeed a pilgrim's shrine.

South of Soldiers' Home on North Capitol Street lies McMillan Park and therein is to be seen a memorial fountain of very beautiful design modeled by Herbert Adams of New York, and erected by the people of Detroit in memory of the late Senator McMillan, to whom the appointment of the Washington Park Commission by the Senate was due.

At Kendall Green, outside the city limits but accessible by electric car, is the famous Gallaudet Memorial by Daniel C. French, one of the most beautiful memorials erected in America.

In the Capitol, and adorning its exterior, will be found examples of some of the earliest sculpture produced by Americans. Much of it is far from good, but some of it is far from being as bad as it is accredited. The statue of Freedom by Crawford, which surmounts the dome, is peculiarly decorative and appropriate. Greenough and Crawford, Rogers and Story, were perhaps not great lights, but they were hardy pioneers and they wrought with sincerity and high-minded purpose. Statuary Hall has become not so much a Hall of Fame as the butt of ridicule, but if one will tarry long enough to examine carefully, it will be found that some of the statues are by no means unworthy. If they were more in scale and better placed the impression would be less distressing.

Among comparatively recent works in sculpture are the statues in the rotunda of the Library of Congress representing great characters in history. Among these are Paul Bartlett's Michael Angelo and Columbus, and Macmonnies' Shakespeare, which possess extraordinary merit and interest.

The Library of Congress was completed in 1897 and was the first Government building in which mural paint-

ings were made an integral part of the structural design. Other buildings since erected have perhaps been better decorated, but none has exerted so wide an influence upon the art of our Nation. It has served as an example for other public bulidings and it has given great impetus to mural painting in America. Adequate information is given about these decorations in the official guide books, but special mention may be made here of the notable series by John W. Alexander illustrating "The Evolution of the Book," Walter MacEwen's frieze "The Greek Heroes," Edward Simmonds' "Muses" and Henry Oliver Walker's beautiful lunette, "Lyric Poetry," all of which are on the main floor of the Library building.

On the second floor of the Library of Congress is located the Print Division which has the custody of the National Print Collection, now grown to very significant proportions, by gift, loan and purchase, the Art reading room and such exhibits as may be from time to time set forth.

There are in Washington two galleries of Art—the National Gallery, which is now housed in the new National Museum building, Tenth and B Streets, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, at Seventeenth Street and New York Avenue. The former is still in its infancy though not recently founded. It contains an exceptionally fine collection of contemporary American paintings given by Mr. William T. Evans of New York, the Harriet Lane Johnston collection and miscellaneous loans. The splendid Freer collection, comprising oriental paintings and objects of art, paintings by Whistler, the Peacock Room, and works by Dewing, Thayer and Tryon, which has been deeded to the Nation, but will not pass into its possession during the lifetime of the donor, is to be reckoned a part of the National Gallery collection, though it will be housed in a separate building specially erected for the purpose. This is indeed a munificent gift.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art is a privately endowed institution which came into existence in 1869 through the public-spirited generosity of the late W. W. Corcoran, a citizen of Washington. It has occupied its present building, designed by Ernest Flagg, since 1897. The permanent collection of the Corcoran Gallery comprises many excellent contemporary paintings, both American and foreign, casts of antique sculpture, original sculptures, and other objects of art. Special mention may be made of its collection of Barye bronzes as well as its nearly complete collection of portraits by St. Memin. The entrance hall and the monumental staircase are specially fine and the series of picture galleries are admirably arranged. In the Corcoran Gallery every two years a great contemporary exhibition of American paintings is held which takes on the character of a national affair, and during the winter seasons there are held in its Hemicycle Hall an almost uninterrupted series of lesser but still important exhibitions. The Corcoran Gallery is open without fee on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, as well as on Sunday afternoons. Other days twenty-five cents is charged for admission. The hours are from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. on all week days except Monday, when the doors do not open until noon.

South of the Corcoran Gallery on Seventeenth Street stands Continental Memorial Hall, the home of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and south of it is the Pan American Union, erected through the munificence of Andrew Carnegie. This building is one of the most beautiful in Washington and unquestionably deserves to be ranked with the works of art. Its style is peculiarly appropriate and yet has been admirably adapted to accord with its surroundings. The entrance hall takes the form of a patio set between monumental staircases. In the center of the court is an Aztec foun-

tain designed by Mrs. H. C. Whitney. At the head of the stairs in the rear of the main building is "The Hall of the Americas," a stately room, beautifully proportioned. The architects of this building are Kelsey and Cret of Philadelphia, and the grounds were laid out under the direction of Frederick Law Olmsted of Boston.

In this same neighborhood on the corner of Eighteenth Street and New York Avenue is The Octagon, owned by the American Institute of Architects, which was designed by Thornton, about 1800, as a residence for Colonel Tayloe and occupied by the Madisons after the Executive Mansion was burned. In it are now located the main offices of not only the American Institute of Architects, but the American Federation of Arts, the Archeaological Institute of America, and the American Academy in Rome. With its old garden, and its unaltered interior, it is an interesting type of the urban dwellings of Washington more than a hundred years ago when the National Capitol was still a city in a wilderness.

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